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SUBJECT: EASTERN CHAD: SECURITY FAMILIARIZATION VISIT TO ABEICHE --  
REPORT OF FINDINGS

Ref A. NDJAMENA 40; B. NDJAMENA 150

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS  
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1. (SBU) Post's current security practices for travelers to Abeche and eastern Chad under Chief of Mission authority are largely adequate within the security context. These practices are based on the operating rule that travelers will be under the protection of, and will abide by, the practices and procedures of MINURCAT or the traveler's partner UN Agency. The relative threats in Abeche of residential break-in (low) vs. that of carjacking (high) may indicate a need to adjust lodging requirements to minimize USG employee transit times while working in that city. Air travel continues to be reliable and safe, and serves all significant field operations centers. Ground travel is increasingly dangerous due to entrenched, violent, politically protected criminality that targets the international community in general and humanitarian workers in the field in particular with near-total impunity.

2. (SBU) It appears that the trustworthy security forces in the area, whether MINURCAT troops or the special Chadian humanitarian police force DIS (see below), are deployed in insufficient numbers, and are unsuited by mandate and design, to the task of providing area security through presence, or point-to-point escort of the hundreds of humanitarian workers and supply convoys operating in a vast territory of great distances and difficult terrain. While there remains hope that MINURCAT will eventually achieve its full deployment force, and that the DIS will slowly evolve into a functioning policing capability, neither of these two events will happen during the potentially dangerous dry season that has just begun, and will last into June of 2010 -- and even a MINURCAT at full force will be hard pressed to successfully implement a very difficult mandate in a hostile space. Post will ensure that our vulnerable partners in the field are fully apprised of this probability, and given every opportunity to take such actions as they believe appropriate to ensure their safety, within the internationally accepted principles guiding humanitarian and military operations in a conflict zone. END SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.

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INTRODUCTION

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13. (SBU) RSO and RefCoords visited Abeche, eastern Chad, from 27 to 29 OCT. Official USG travelers under Chief of Mission authority have to date utilized the support and abided by the security practices and requirements of partner UN agencies when traveling in eastern Chad. The goal of this visit was to develop contacts within UN Agency and MINURCAT Security offices; become familiar with UN Department for Safety and Security (UN DSS) and MINURCAT standard operating procedures for movement and residential security; and review current best practices for travel to the humanitarian assistance areas of operation in eastern Chad. RSO and RefCoords held discussions with MINURCAT, International Criminal Court, and UNHCR civilian security, operations, and intelligence officials and with MINURCAT military officers attached to the Irish Headquarters and Sector South units. Additional attention was given to the operations of the International Organization for Migration (IOM -- an international organization outside the UN structure) in preparation for broad collaboration among the State and Homeland Security Departments and IOM for the resettlement of refugees from eastern Chad to the U.S., to be reported separately.

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ABECHE: HUMANITARIAN  
OPERATIONAL HUB  
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14. (SBU) The town of Abeche serves the eastern Chad "humanitarian space" as the logistics and operational hub for all UN humanitarian agencies, including the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Program (WFP), etc. It is also the forward deployed operational headquarters of the UN Mission to the Central African Republic and Chad (Mission des Nations Unies en

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Rpublique centrafricaine et au Tchad -- MINURCAT), a Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) with a UN Security Council mandate to improve operational security for IOs and NGOs assisting refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) populations in the humanitarian space. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) maintain operational and logistical offices and residences in Abeche to both interface with UN agencies, and to provide support to staff implementing projects in the "deep field". The eastern Chad region is roughly the size of California, with three major "deep field" operations areas clustered around the towns of Iriba and Guereda in the north, Farchana in the center, and Goz Beida in the south. Bahai in the far north is also an important center from which services to refugee populations are deployed.

15. (SBU) UN Agencies are operating in Abeche and the entire region of eastern Chad under UN DSS security rating of "Phase IV". This designation is officially defined as "Emergency programmes only. All staff who are not directly concerned with emergency or humanitarian relief operations or security matters are relocated outside the country." This indicates a highly volatile and potentially dangerous security environment in which remaining UN Agency personnel should be prepared to evacuate at any time. In practice, UN Agency personnel appear to exercise the same level of caution in Abeche as in N'Djamena (under Phase III -- "Relocation: Staff and families are temporarily concentrated or relocated to specified sites/locations and/or eligible dependants are relocated outside the country"), with some additional precautions, (see below) while being prepared for changed circumstances with little or no notice.

16. (SBU) The UN designated Eastern Chad as a Phase IV security environment in December 2006, following the rebel incursions during which fighting between the rebels and the government put humanitarian at risk, and humanitarian warehouses and facilities were looted. The continuation of the Phase IV security designation is based on the "continued tensions in the border areas" [July 14, 2009 SG report to SC on MINURCAT] and is largely driven by the possibility of another major, organized armed incursion into Chad by an armed Chadian opposition group or groups seeking to overthrow the current authorities in N'Djamena. However, the security briefing to newly arrived UN Agency personnel focuses entirely on the risks

posed by a high and increasing level of violent criminality that appears to be deeply entrenched; to be connected to and protected by instances of official and unofficial power; to enjoy nearly complete impunity; and to target the international humanitarian community as the most attractive source of goods for theft, and individuals for kidnap and extortion.

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SECURITY IN ABECHE --  
RESIDENTIAL  
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17. (SBU) Mission policy until early 2009 was that all USG visitors to Abeche and the deep field would house on the residential compound of their UN partner agency, and abide by the UN DSS Minimal Operational Safety Standards (MOSS) and Minimal Operational Residential Standards (MORS) in effect. (NOTE: RSO and RefCoords requested that UN security officers share the MOSS and MORS documents; security officers were reticent to approve such a request, suggesting that Post approach MINURCAT Chief Security Officer Bertrand Bourgain with our request. END NOTE.) Following an outbreak of residential compound invasions and robberies in Abeche, some accompanied by violence, Post determined in early 2009 that only the French and EUFOR bases provided sufficient residential security and suspended all official USG overnights in Abeche, as lodging on those bases was not available [Ref A]. Negotiations between IO Bureau/USUN New York and UN DPKO, and between Post and MINURCAT in N'djamena, resulted in a cooperative agreement for USG travelers under Chief of Mission authority to house in pre-fab housing units on the MINURCAT military base in Abeche. Visits to the deep field remain under the original policy requiring housing on UN Agency compounds under UN DSS MORS and MOSS.

18. (SBU) Lodging on the MINURCAT base is now Post's "gold standard" against which other housing options are measured. The base is

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considered to be essentially guaranteed against residential invasion or break-in. It is within the same perimeter berm and walls of the airfield. The housing units are co-located on base with a dining facility providing three acceptable quality meals per day, and with high-standard medical care at the Norwegian Deployable Field Hospital. (NOTE: Although the USG does not have a formal agreement with MINURCAT guaranteeing medical treatment should travelers under Chief of Mission Authority require it, RSO and RefCoords were assured that such treatment would not be refused. END NOTE).

19. (SBU) The housing is nonetheless distant from areas where USG visitors must conduct business -- 15 to 20 minutes' drive to circumnavigate the airfield, along unpaved roads with clear choke-points where carjackings were routinely perpetrated and that now require 24/7 Detachment Integr de Scurit -- "DIS" (see below) mounted units at a static post.

110. (SBU) A review and walk-through of the UNHCR compound -- the facility USG visitors used most in the past, and where many conduct USG business -- revealed physical security standards that are commensurate with Post's residence policy for N'Djamena, including perimeter walls, gates, invasion deterrence (concertina wire and window bars, lighting, etc), and contract guard services. In addition, the extensive UNHCR compound -- actually at least six separate housing compounds that have been linked together to form single unit about the size of a city block, containing offices, separate residences and the guesthouses -- is co-located with the UNICEF compound and a number of partner NGO office and housing units making contact with partner agencies highly secure. The compound has a food service canteen integrated into it; is within five minutes' drive of the airfield and MINURCAT headquarters; and has DIS mounted units standing 24/7 static-post guard. The compound had been approved for daytime use as a refugee interview site by DHS officers. [Ref B]

111. (SBU) At this time, the primary threat to travelers in Abeche appears to be carjacking (see below), with the number of incidents continuing to be high. The spate of residential compound break-ins

of early 2009 subsided at mid-year, and the placement of DIS static-post guards at the major UN compounds appears to have been a factor. Given that day-light vehicle movements appear more vulnerable than night-time lodgings, a reconsideration of the requirement that travelers under Chief of Mission authority be housed on the relatively distant MINURCAT base may be in order.

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SECURITY IN ABECHE --  
GROUND MOVEMENTS  
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¶12. (SBU) Abeche and eastern Chad has been the location of numerous carjackings in recent months -- a total of 51 since January 2009. UN DSS MOSS appears to mitigate this problem by ensuring that all vehicles operating in Abeche are equipped with VHF and HF radios, and that all movements respect institutional curfews (there are no curfews in Chad enforced by the authorities). These allow movement by single vehicle from 0500 hrs to 1800 hrs; all movements from 1800 hrs to 2100 hrs are to be in two-vehicle convoys; all personnel and vehicles must be behind secured compound walls at 2100 hrs. Emergency movements after 2100 hrs must be in two-vehicle convoys, and accompanied by DIS escort.

¶13. (SBU) Driving into the Abeche commercial center even during daylight hours is not recommended; circulation on foot in these areas is discouraged. In practice, most carjackings have been documented to occur between 1700 and 1900 hrs; DIS escorts are difficult to obtain without significant advance notice, though in extremis DIS officers have been more responsive in recent months than in the early days of the force (see below).

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SECURITY FORCES IN THE  
"HUMANITARIAN SPACE":  
MINURCAT  
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¶14. (SBU) Field operations centers serve as hubs to support project implementation in refugee and IDP population concentrations and camps. MINURCAT forces, once fully deployed, are mandated to provide "area security" through high visibility presence throughout the "humanitarian space". Battalion-strength (800-troops) MINURCAT military units are to be deployed to Forward Operating Base (FOB) installations at the field operations centers. The mandated force strength is roughly 5,200 troops, of which 2500 are eventually to be operationally deployed to forward bases in Abeche, Iriba, Farchana and Goz Beida; the rest of the planned troop strength is in support functions. Troop contributing countries include Albania, Austria, Croatia, Finland, France, Ghana, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia and Togo; Mongolian, Nepalese Gurkha, Pakistani and Senegalese troops are to replace rotating Austrian, French and Polish troops and equipment as the force pushes toward full strength.

¶15. (SBU) Currently deployed MINURCAT force strength as of end-October is at some 51 percent of mandate, with only 998 troops operationally deployed to patrol the humanitarian space in the deep field, with another 1207 troops based in Abeche with some patrol duties. The Polish and Croatian combined force in Sector-North (Iriba) are at quarter-strength (258 troops), with another 43 troops in Guereda 75 kms away; the Irish and Finnish units in Sector-South (Goz Beida) have exceeded half-strength (495 troops). The Ghanaian "Battalion" deployed to the heavily criminalized area around Farchana is under quarter-strength at 202 troops (all figures as of 01 NOV). In all units, only a portion of the troops deployed -- generally around 50 percent, -- are operationally assigned to patrol and escort, with the rest devoted to headquarters and support duties. Deployment schedules have rarely been respected. European troops ending their deployment in October are rotating out taking with them all their vehicles. Non-European troops routinely arrive late and without essential equipment, especially vehicles -- the recently deployed Nepalese Gurkha units arrived without ammunition. The MINURCAT RSO estimates that for the next several months

MINURCAT's operationally effective force strength will be less than 40 percent, even if there is a one-for-one replacement of troops, due to the reduction in mobility assets connected to the departure of Austrian, French, and Polish forces.

¶16. (SBU) Helicopter support has consistently been less than mandated or recommended. The humanitarian space to be patrolled and dominated to provide area security through presence on the ground is roughly the size of California. At the currently deployed operational strength of 1,137 troops to patrol such a vast space, and even at full strength of the planned operational complement of 2500 troops sometime in the undetermined future, without adequate vehicles to ensure ground mobility and under-served with air assets, it is difficult to imagine how this small force can ever succeed in fulfilling this mandate of the provision of area security, even if only along the most heavily used roadways -- the cumulative distances to secure are in the tens of thousands of kilometers. Effective use of the force has been made, however, in the provision of security for specific operations in carefully defined, limited areas, including the ongoing camp-by-camp population verification ("braceleting") exercise that UNHCR is currently conducting.

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SECURITY FORCES IN THE  
"HUMANITARIAN SPACE":  
THE "DIS"  
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¶17. (SBU) The D'tachement Integr de Scurit -- "DIS" is a specialized policing capacity created with international funding and UN POL training and mentoring to provide security specifically to vulnerable refugee and IDP populations, and to humanitarian workers. Mixed Police/Gendarme units of the DIS are deployed in Abeche and to the field operations centers, with smaller units deployed in police stations at refugee camp locations. Total DIS strength is roughly 800 officers, who have received one or two months training (depending on date of entry to service), and are generally considered to be better trained and equipped than conventional Chadian police and gendarme units. These units also operate in the

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towns co-located with refugee and IDP populations.

¶18. (SBU) The DIS may be at a turning point after some eight months in operation. The first six months were characterized by acts of indiscipline including theft, abuse, and rape; poor driving and numerous crashed vehicles; confusion over chain of command; poor UN POL supervision by international police officers drawn from countries with sub-standard forces; and either unresponsiveness or inappropriate and sometimes extreme actions taken in response to requests for assistance. Conflict has erupted among DIS and conventional police and gendarme units. DIS units have been targeted for theft, and have at times been as vulnerable to attack as the populations they are to protect. This has led some humanitarian workers, including some senior personnel in the UN Agencies, to characterize the DIS as "worse than nothing." At the minimum, it could not be considered a functional police force under even the most charitable of definitions.

¶19. (SBU) However, in the last two months, there are more reports of better responsiveness from DIS units. Response times have improved in recent residential break-ins; actions have been effective to impede or interdict some crimes and to recover stolen property, especially in the case of recent attempts at carjacking and kidnapping; fewer accusations against DIS personnel of rape or abuse are being made. A revised two-month training program is in place with 150 graduates expected end-October. Current members are to begin refresher training once the new recruits enter on duty. Female DIS officers have received praise from humanitarian workers and vulnerable populations.

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AIR TRAVEL AMONG CENTERS  
OF FIELD OPERATIONS  
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¶20. (SBU) Mission's SOP is currently to travel the roughly 600 kms between N'Djamena and Abeche by air, using either the daily United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights operated by the logistics element of the WFP, or special flights organized by MINURCAT. Airport security is determined by GoC regulation and practice.

¶21. (SBU) Air travel via daily UNHAS flights is also required between Abeche and the deep field centers of Iriba (approx 210 kmks), Farchana (approx 130 kms), and Goz Beida (approx 190 kms). Additional deep field locations of Bahai (approx 300 kms) and Guereda (150 kms) are also served with daily flights. The NGO Air Serv International also operates regularly scheduled (though not always daily) flight routes to Guereda, Iriba, and Bahai in the north; to Goz Beida, Koukou (approx. 210 kms), and Dogdore (approx 300 kms) in the south; and to Haraze in the southwest. Air Serv will organize special flights on an urgent basis, flying when and where the need is most, including to areas un-served by UNHAS, with flexibility to provide medevac and conflict evacuation.

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GROUND TRAVEL AMONG FIELD  
OPERATIONS CENTERS AND  
PROJECT SITES  
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¶22. (SBU) Mission policy has been to strongly discourage/prohibit ground transport for personnel under Chief of Mission authority between N'Djamena and Abeche, and from Abeche to all deep field destinations served by air, due to high levels of criminality along all roads to these locations. Mission policy is that USG personnel operating in these areas between field centers and refugee or IDP population locations submit to the security procedures of the partner UN Agency, and conduct all ground movements in accordance with that agency's practices.

¶23. (SBU) The UN Agencies require all ground movements outside urban areas of any duration (generally beyond 10 kms) to have armed escort from one of the available security forces in the area. UN Agencies such as the WFP conduct long-distance transport of large cargoes (food and non-food assistance and heavy equipment) via road under

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armed MINURCAT and sometimes armed DIS escort (not all DIS units are armed). For day-to-day operations between the field operations centers and the locations of refugee and IDP populations, UN Agencies assemble at the field center in daily DIS-escorted convoys for all humanitarian organizations wishing to avail themselves of the escort.

¶24. (SBU) NGOs operating in collaboration with UN Agencies and/or under cooperative agreement with the USG are responsible for determining their security practices and procedures. While many accept to work within UN Agency guidelines on ground movements, some subscribe to internationally recognized humanitarian principles that call for the demilitarization and neutrality of the provision of assistance. (NOTE: The Departments of State and Defense, the US Institute for Peace, and the NGO umbrella group InterAction, published in 2008 guidelines for appropriate collaboration between military units and humanitarian NGOs in conflict areas, which recognized the principles of demilitarization and neutrality. END NOTE.)

¶25. (SBU) Faced with rising criminality along all roads essential to humanitarian operations and in the towns and camps where operations are undertaken and humanitarian workers reside, and under-manned to provide area security through presence on the ground, MINURCAT has tried to free some of the small forward deployed force to provide point-to-point escort for humanitarian workers and goods convoys. This has been somewhat effective for large convoys of goods, such as bulk food and non-food items deliveries. This has been too cumbersome for small groups of humanitarian workers needing maximum flexibility of movement to be able to achieve the results established in their funding agreements with the UN Agencies, the USG, and other donors, given the requirements of a minimum 72- (preferably 96-) hour advance request period. Humanitarian workers

report that they are told MINURCAT escort must be the last resort for their operations, with their first recourse being the D'tachment Intgr de Scurit (DIS). (Note: The DIS' standard operating procedures are not to escort convoys farther than 10 km outside Abeche or away from their established base. However, it is clear that UNHCR and other agencies organize DIS escorted convoys for significantly greater distances. END NOTE.) The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been facilitating refugee movements between the camps and the processing site in Abeche by road convoy. During the pilot in February, some 11 were escorted by MINURCAT or DIS. However, since September, there has been some difficulty securing escorts; 3 of 4 of IOM's requests were refused as they exceeded the 10 km limit for DIS and MINURCAT resources were not available.

126. (SBU) A significant gap in DIS capabilities has been in the provision of point-to-point escort for humanitarian workers. The DIS force was not conceived for this activity. It was designed to provide policing to the areas in the immediate vicinity of vulnerable populations, including vehicle and foot patrols and response to incidents of crime. Keeping a minimum required force in place for these activities leaves few officers for escort duty. Vehicles are in very short supply after numerous accidents, and the Nissan Patrol and Toyota Prado SUVs are inadequate to the environment, leaving a large percentage of the force's vehicles either totaled or down for repair.

127. (SBU) Escort requests placed 72- to 96-hours in advance are routinely refused for lack of personnel and vehicles. Despite some improvements in operational effectiveness, DIS units routinely do not arrive on time to conduct a ground movement escort, and are known to not show up at all. Delayed convoys from operations centers to camps, which must travel in some areas up to 100 kms in each direction over poor roads at slow, convoy speeds have resulted in daily work hours in camps of only 3 to 4 hours per day -- insufficient to accomplish required tasks in safety. DIS officer numbers, although set to increase somewhat, will not receive sufficient reinforcement to make a noticeable difference in these operational gaps.

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EVACUATION PLANNING IN  
THE "HUMANITARIAN SPACE"

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128. (SBU) As noted above, widespread, entrenched, and politically connected criminality has become the primary security threat in Abeche and eastern Chad. Evacuation planning, on the other hand, is currently integrated into the UN DSS Phase IV security rating, and a response to the threat of major incursion of an armed Chadian opposition group or groups. Such groups have in the past entered Chad from several points along the Chad-Sudan border, and pushed westward toward N'Djamena. The Chadian authorities have countered with a powerful build-up of armed forces along the border. In recent incursions, armed opposition forces have either advanced or retreated through field operations locations as well as Abeche. Some force-on-force confrontations have occurred in these urban areas, posing a threat of cross- and indirect fire incidents to humanitarian workers. More dangerous, however, has been the convulsions of lawlessness, looting, and violence that the populations of these urban areas have committed in immediate run-up and aftermath of these events.

129. (SBU) UN DSS and MINURCAT security officers have stated that USG travelers under Chief of Mission authority, traveling in the region in partnership with a UN Agency or MINURCAT, are considered members of that Agency's population to be accorded security and evacuation should events require. All field locations are organized under a UN Warden System, with volunteer wardens responsible for compiling and maintaining personnel lists for UN and NGO staff who would fall under evacuation assistance provisions. Abeche and deep field locations have designated assembly points for all staff under UN DSS security provisions. The UNHCR residential compound in deep field sites is the assembly point for most such locations. Abeche is

divided into 5 zones, each with one or several assembly points, depending on the number of personnel residing or working in each zone; the UNHCR compound is the assembly point for a large concentration of UN agencies and NGOs with offices and residences in the zone nearest the airport. Assembly points are to be equipped with water and food supplies to cover a "bunkering" period; it is not clear that all assembly points have safe-haven facilities.

130. (SBU) MINURCAT forward deployed elements have assigned duties for the securing of all designated assembly points. The MINURCAT bases and headquarters compounds in Abeche, Iriba, Farchana, and Goz Beida -- all co-located with the airfields in these sites -- also serve as assembly points. As soon as practicable in a given crisis, MINURCAT units are to provide escort for all eligible personnel from assembly points to the appropriate airfield. This may involve helicopter evacuation of deep field personnel to the nearest field operations center. From that location, fixed-wing air assets from MINURCAT, UNHAS, and Air Serve are to airlift all eligible personnel to safety in either Abeche or N'Djamena, depending upon the nature of the crisis.

131. (SBU) These plans have been executed in the recent past, with a more or less good success. Although some staff isolated in compounds or deep field locations were missed in first round personnel movements, in all cases second sorties were successfully executed. While UN officials provide assurances that all international humanitarian will be evacuated, the necessary bureaucratic procedures to operationalize this are not fully in place. NGOs -- in particular a large staff from a US-based NGO not under Chief of Mission authority, working in a PRM -funded operation -- have found it difficult to get staff added to the appropriate warden list; to receive security briefings on arrival; and to have access badges and properly programmed VHF radios issued. Important questions remain, however, as to who exactly qualifies as eligible staff for evacuation assistance particularly host national staffs of both NGOs and IOs, especially though not uniquely those whose home regions in Chad are far from the eastern area. The USG has no established cooperative agreement with UN DSS or MINURCAT to ensure that US Embassy personnel, whether US citizen or Locally Engaged Staff members, traveling on official business under Chief of Mission authority would be availed assistance.

NIGRO